

## **Excerpt from *All the Pennsylvania Left to See*, 1<sup>st</sup> Place, Collection of Stories, 2011 Utah Original Writing Competition**

### **Onions**

By Larkin Weyand

Kara is the name of my girlfriend and I'm waiting for her in the living room of her parents' house. I've been sitting her for nearly 30 minutes. Gracie, Kara's nine-year-old half-sister (Kara's dad remarried when Kara was seven), comes in and sits on my lap. She's a wiggly shy girl prone to smiles at odd moments. I think she's a thinker without any compulsion to tell you what she's thinking. She is her own perfect audience. Of all of Kara's sisters, full or half, I see the most Kara in Gracie.

She rarely talks but tonight she does. "What will I do when I get married?"

"I don't know," I say, "but I think when you're married, you hold hands and sometimes you kiss."

"Will I *French* kiss?"

I am stunned. "I don't know. I don't know if you'll do that. What do you think a French kiss is?"

"I think a French kiss is when your tongues touch."

"How do you know that?" I say, trying to sound as uncertain as possible.

"Kara told me."

Kids, I think. It is quiet between us for a moment. Gracie stares off into the corner where the Sunday papers from the past six months are piled. The room smells like dust. I clear my

throat. “One time I kissed Kara and our tongues touched and she’d just had onions so it was really gross.”

Gracie smiles at some private thought.

“What?”

She laughs. “I like onions.”

She hops off my lap and skips away. I am convinced that through some twist of fate, I’ve traveled back in time and just talked to the nine-year-old Kara. If I’m wrong, if I haven’t traveled back in time, is the world really ready for the sequel of Kara?

Suddenly, Gracie reappears in the hallway. I call to her.

“Will you go get Kara?”

“She’s nursing,” she says and looks at me like I’ve told a dirty joke or like the Police just found a pack of gum in my jacket that I didn’t pay for. “She can’t come down until she’s done.”

This is Jackie’s rule. Jackie is Gracie’s mother and Kara’s stepmother. Every time, and I mean EVERY TIME, I come over here to the Sanders home, I have to wait at least 30 minutes to see Kara and our son because “Kara’s nursing.” These are the only words Jackie (I am expected to still call her Mrs. Sanders—certainly not Jackie, and Mom, NO WAY), ever says to me. I have trouble understanding why it would be such a ‘naughty’ thing for me to see the mother of my child nurse. What’s done is done. If it’s such a big deal, get a blanket. I’ve made the suggestion, but people just smile. It’s not a happy smile. When it’s just Kara and me, I call her the Dairy Queen. She makes the same not happy smile.

“Gracie,” I say. “Look at this.” I extend my legs so that I can reach down into my pocket. Gracie comes to my side and waits like she thinks I’m going to give her some candy. Instead I pull out a little furry box. I open it and show her the ring I bought for Kara.

Gracie covers her mouth with her hands. “I want one,” she says. “It’s such a pretty little diamond.”

I don’t tell her that it’s not a real diamond. I don’t know if I’ll tell Kara. Instead I tell Gracie that maybe someday, when she’s older, a special boy will come along and give her a diamond too.

“But not until I have a baby first.”

Again, she darts away, wiser than she knows. I watch her go out into the hall and run into Kara, holding our four-month-old son. Gracie taps Kara on the leg and says, “Don’t eat onions. He thinks they’re gross.”

The baby fusses. I don’t know how long Kara’s been standing there. I don’t know if the tears in her eyes are good or bad. I just get down on my knees and hold up the ring to both of them.

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